12: Collinson--249-250 (1851-53) 1889 Copper Eskimo
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"Among the party [a group of Eskimo visiting aboard the Enterprise] were several boys, some not more than 12 years old; and it was quite surprising to [250] see with what impunity they bore the cold, nor did they appear tired, never sitting down or taking any rest on their arrival."

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of us with a morsel of dried trout. It may seem strange that such close kinsmen should insist on a formal display of hospitality and goodwill, but Eskimos, like all human beings, are slaves to customs of their own creation.

The increasing number of cracks in the ice, and of deep pools round the margins of the lakes, induced Ikpuck and Parted-Hair to adopt another mode of fishing. In place of the hook and sinker on their lines they attached the gleaming tooth of a polar bear, and whenever a fish approached this lure promptly transfixed it with a long-handled trident fitted with three bone barbs. They even waded out into the water and chased the fish back and forth until the survivors escaped under the ice. The latter method was so successful that they often speared in twenty minutes twice as many fish as the rest of us caught in a day; but it required amazing endurance, for their blood almost coagulated at times and their limbs became stiff and black. One could readily account for Ikpuck's rheumatism, though he himself would not have understood the explanation. I noticed that nearly half their catch consisted of salmon-trout, weighing, on an average, only three or four pounds, whereas the salmon-trout that migrate from the sea each year to spawn in lakes nearer to the coast average between eight and ten pounds. Evidently their growth is stunted by permanent imprisonment in fresh water. They

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visible, but two hares started up beneath our feet and 224
fled to the extreme edge of the snow-patch. They seemed to know that their coats had not yet changed to a summer brown, for they crouched there, half invisible, until we almost walked on top of them; then, flashing white on the dull clay, they sped across to the next snow-patch and again crouched motionless. But a hunter who lives by the chase feels no pity for his victims, and both animals, despite their pathetic ruses, soon dangled over The Runner's shoulder.

The sky clouded in the afternoon, and a fierce snow- [132]
storm broke in our faces, blotting everything from view. It was useless to keep on travelling, for a caribou might pass unseen within ten yards of us; it was equally useless to turn back and wander for hours vainly seeking the camp. We looked around for shelter. There was none; no cliff, not even a boulder. [489]
The Runner and I sat on the snow, shoulder to shoul- 516
der, backs to the wind; while Leaf, his wife, crouched [147]
in the angle between our outstretched legs. After a long half-hour the storm began to pass over. When I mentioned the change to my companions Leaf raised her head and smiled. The Runner did not hear; with folded arms and head drooping on his chest he was sleeping.

We circled back toward the tents after the gale abated, and in spite of the light fog that still hung over the landscape stumbled on two young bulls, both

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summer the deep tanning of their skin masked its uncleanliness. It was easy to discover one reason for the peculiar atmosphere of an Eskimo throng. The odour was really a composite one, the smell of fur clothing mingling with the distinctively human odour that characterizes all races, but differs in each one. Neither Eskimo society nor our own ever discusses this topic, although Icehouse once confessed to me in private that her people had found the odour of the white man very disagreeable. However that may be, my bathing, being purely voluntary, certainly excited much interest, and when I stole away to the pool for the second bath, Ikpuck notified the whole party. Innocently devoid of clothes, I was disporting gaily in the water when the sound of voices made me look up. Men, women, and children lined the bank above me, intently watching the exhibition. None of them knew how to swim, or even that it was possible, and they gasped with admiration when I dived out of sight and reappeared a few yards away. *Honi soit qui mal y pense.* Ikpuck, The Runner, and even the latter's wife stripped off their clothes immediately and joined me in the water, eager to receive a first lesson in the newly discovered art.

We were now so close to our caches on the coast that my companions decided to deposit there, before turning westward, the small quantity of dried fish they were carrying against emergencies. The visit enabled

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and the remainder, fleeing to the ridge, drew back before another volley. Three times we drove them back and forth in this way before the survivors broke through our lines, leaving eight of their number dead or dying on the hunting-field.

My Ross rifle failed me twice during this action. Once I had trouble in closing the breech, and once the firing-pin struck so lightly that the cartridge failed to explode. In both cases the cause was probably the same, a little sand that had blown into the leather holster when crossing the storm-swept plain. I had carefully cleaned the weapon before using it, but evidently a few particles of sand still remained in the bolt. It was this same defect in the Ross rifle that created so much bitterness in the early months of the great European war, and finally led to the re-arming of the Canadian troops with the British Lee-Enfield.

My companions, elated by the success of their hunt, feasted and idled for two days. The reasons they offered were excellent; drizzling rain made travelling unpleasant, the meat we had accumulated was more than we could carry, and the green hides needed to be scraped and dried. But the principal reason remained subconscious. For a few hours, or for two or three days, they could display phenomenal energy—even the children were inured to sleepless hunting trips of thirty-six hours' duration; but they could not plod along, day after day and week after week, at an even

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147 rate of progress, because this sustained effort involved a mental strain to which they were totally unaccus-
484 tomed. We had travelled long and far for three days,
261 and they needed an interval to recuperate. During those three days, too, they had suffered from hunger, for we had killed no game; and now they gorged themselves so freely that involuntarily I thought of Icehouse's reproach to the dogs, "They have no bottoms to their stomachs." The human body is remarkably plastic; through generation after generation these Eskimos had developed something of the nature of the camel, being capable of taking in a few hours sufficient nourishment to compensate for one period of scarcity and to carry them over another.

526 During these days of idleness they indulged in various pastimes. They set up a clod of turf about a foot square, and, standing back forty paces, shot at it with their bows. Only about one arrow in twenty hit the target, so that either their marksmanship was poor
[868] or their bows very inferior. Since they had all practised archery from childhood, and two of the men, Ikpuck and The Runner, were noted hunters, the fault
411 evidently lay in their bows. These belonged to the type technically known as "composite," like the well-known Tartar bows. The framework was of three pieces of wood rudely jointed together, two end pieces or horns curving backward and a middle piece. All the back of the wood was covered with a narrow band

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ing-bags, singing in chorus between intervals of sleep, or mocking each other's voices. Our gaiety infected even the dignified Ikpuck, who improvised a comic song about my adventure with the wolf on the Coppermine River. No hardship could quench the cheerfulness of my companions. When morning dawned, and, breakfastless, we struggled ahead in the teeth of the gale, they launched many a jest at Icehouse, who, ill-prepared for such inclement weather, had enveloped her portly figure in a sleeping-robe, and waddled along with the rolling gait of a bear.

The snow melted slowly, for the brief summer was drawing to its close. The last of the flowers lay withered, butterflies and moths had vanished, and even the mosquitoes had ceased their endless buzzing. The days were shortening rapidly; darkness covered the land for three hours around midnight, and on still evenings ice was forming on the ponds and lakes. It was time to retrace our steps to our caches, take down the sleds, and seek out warmer clothing. But, before turning back, we could make one brief dash to the northward and try our fortunes in the hills behind Cape Baring.

Two days later, in the unmelted snow on the slope of a ridge, we came upon the fresh tracks of two polar bears. Here was game worth the hunting. We dropped our packs on the ridge-top in charge of Ice-

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from some clothes that were packed in a bag on the house-roof. Jennie refused, and petulantly turned her face to the wall. Her cousin entered the hut, and, seeing his playmate sulking in the corner, jeered at her behind her back; but a backhand that neatly struck his eye changed his jeering to a wail. The indignant Icehouse poked her daughter with a stick until she, too, added her voice to the lamentable chorus. Partnership in grief then brought comfort to both children, who left the hut together and built a common playhouse in the snow outside. Pain alone could not make them weep so readily. I had seen Jennie stumble against a stone and bruise her knee so severely that she limped for two or three days; but when some one asked her if she were hurt she straightened up resentfully and marched ahead without a tear.

Even I grew restless at our inactivity. Bernard Harbour seemed so near across the strait, and for seven months I had heard no word of English, and received no news of my comrades on the expedition. In clear weather we could see the Liston and Sutton Islands on the horizon, and the station lay only twelve miles beyond. The dark streaks in the sky that reflected open water had disappeared, and a short excursion seaward revealed no wide cracks or unsafe places in the solid ice. Conditions might be different between the islands and the mainland, but Ikpuck thought that I could make the passage without danger.